Introduction

In the February 1938 issue of *National Geographic*, Julius Eigner introduced the magazine’s substantial reading public to the city of Nanjing. By that time many readers may already have heard of the widely publicized atrocities committed by the Japanese in late 1937 and early 1938. Most probably knew from that incident that the city had been the capital of China under the Chinese Nationalist Party, or the Guomindang (GMD). But beyond these basic facts, the Western public knew little about the city or its inhabitants. Eigner began his article, written in November 1937 before the city’s fall, with some observations about the remarkable transformation that had taken place in the city during the previous ten years: “In 1928 the city had no lighting system worthy of the name, no water works, no sewers; normally, now, its wide thoroughfares blaze with neon lights, modern sanitation has been installed, and water runs from the tap instead of being sold in the streets by the caskful. From a straggling, overgrown village, tucked away behind its immense encircling wall, Nanking fast developed into China’s most progressive metropolis” (Eigner 1938, 189).

Just as remarkable to Eigner was how unexpected the physical transformation of the city had been. “This amazing evolution was achieved in the face of bitter skepticism among those Chinese and foreigners who resented the removal of the Nation’s capital from Peiping [Beijing], with its rich tradition of bygone grandeur and its comfortable amenities. Upstart
Nanking was seen as a mere militarist stronghold, doomed to extinction so soon as a mightier man than Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek should arise” (189). Indeed, there were many who felt this way in China and abroad during the Nanjing Decade from 1927 to 1937. Many might even say now that Eigner’s statement about the city’s future was prophetic: with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party’s victory in the civil war that followed World War II, Nanjing’s capital status was revoked and Beijing became the capital once more.

But for certain moments during those ten years, Nanjing seemed to represent all that the former revolutionary and GMD party founder Sun Yat-sen hoped it would be for a nation struggling to emerge from nearly a century of “humiliation” at the hands of the foreign powers. Back in 1912, when Sun was the first provisional president of the Republic of China, he firmly advocated that Nanjing be made capital instead of Beijing. He hoped that the move would allow the country to make a fresh start, to distance itself from a corrupt, crumbling dynastic system in order to create a vibrant new state that would usher China into the modern age. At that time, Sun was forced to bow to political realities, allowing Yuan Shikai to take the position of president with Beijing as his capital. But in 1928, several years after Sun’s death, when the Nationalist Party’s Northern Expedition nominally reunited the country, the GMD leadership was adamant that the Party Leader’s “long-cherished wish” would be fulfilled. Nanjing was confirmed as the capital, and the party made grand plans to turn the city into a model for modern development and Chinese nationalism. Using the techniques of modern urban planning, the city was to feature the latest in communications and infrastructure technologies, a distinct new architectural style that would be both modern and Chinese, as well as monumental spaces for the performance of celebrations of state that would create loyalty and teach the Chinese people how to be responsible citizens.

In ten years, it was not possible for all of the goals set forth by city planners to be met. There were unforeseen difficulties, such as a worldwide depression and the Japanese invasion of
resource-rich Manchuria. But a good portion of the blame easily went to the GMD itself. Chiang Kai-shek, obsessed with the goal of achieving direct control over his rivals, provoked one after another into a series of civil wars that were costly and demoralizing to a population that mostly wanted to engage in national reconstruction. Furthermore, the Chiang-led GMD constantly postponed implementation of democratic reforms that Sun Yat-sen had called for in his writings. And when people complained about the government, Chiang was more than willing to use censorship and brutal methods to quell dissent. Despite such attempts, however, the Chiang-led GMD never could silence all of its critics, and during the decade thousands of protestors frequently took over the streets of major cities.

Yet by 1936, despite the many unpopular policies of the GMD, the city of Nanjing hosted some of the largest patriotic celebrations that the nation had seen since the birth of the republic. As Eigner put it, the former pessimism “gave way to a feeling of confidence” (189). After all the complaints about moving the capital, somehow ten years had not only brought significant physical changes to the city, but also it seemed to have become a genuine capital, which indeed served as “a Symbol of New China,” just as Sun Yat-sen had hoped it would (191).

This study describes how the “model capital” at Nanjing became a symbol of Chinese nationhood during the first part of the Nationalist era from 1927 to 1937. To do so, it describes the political sources that led to establishing the capital in Nanjing, the ideological discourse used to try to legitimize the city as the new capital, and the “scientific” methodology used to plan the city. It also focuses on the symbolic aspects of building the city: the aesthetic experiments used to construct it, the reinvention of traditions used to make official spaces appear and feel sacred to the populace, and the ways people actually experienced life in the capital. By looking at the various layers of meaning assigned to Nanjing over these years, a better understanding of what it meant and means to be a modern capital in China emerges.
Putting Nanjing Back in the Nanjing Decade

Nanjing is routinely included in Chinese-language works about the great cities of ancient China. It is typically considered to have a “royal air,” with an innate power that emanates from the landscape of mountains and rivers, giving the whole region the power of a “coiling dragon, crouching tiger” \( (longpan huju) \). Nanjing had served as the capital of ten imperial kingdoms and dynasties beginning with the Wu kingdom in the third century CE and reaching a peak of prosperity as a capital for various southern dynasties between 280 and 589. However, the historical memory is tainted by the fact that Nanjing was usually the capital of a divided country, when “barbarians” ruled northern China (Shi Nianhai 1996; Chen Qiaoyi 1991; Zhongguo gudu yanjiu 1986). The pinnacle of Nanjing’s status as an ancient capital arrived when Zhu Yuanzhang founded the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in the city. But even that triumph was short lived. After the Ming founder’s death, officials cited the inherent weakness represented by a southern capital to convince the new emperor to move the capital back to Beijing. Lastly, contemporary histories of China’s ancient capitals usually mention that Nanjing served as the capital of the Taiping “Heavenly Kingdom” of Hong Xiuquan. The period of Hong’s power, however, was also short lived. The Qing dynasty crushed the Taiping capital in 1864, bringing massive destruction from which the city never seemed to fully recover. In short, Chinese histories of ancient capitals portray Nanjing as a city of mixed legacies: power and weakness, pride and humiliation.\(^2\)

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a popular revival of interest in the urban history of modern China. Numerous Chinese-language books have been written on Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou (Canton), often with photographs and colorful stories depicting a vibrant urban culture in the early twentieth century. Similar books on Nanjing have also appeared that portray the city as an important contributor to Chinese modernization. The problem is that Nanjing’s recent past is even more ambiguous—and more sensitive—than its ancient history. While contemporary writers try
to portray Nanjing as the city of great men (such as Sun Yat-sen) and republican dreams, many still consider it the site of great crimes (such as the anti-Communist purge of 1927 and the Nanjing Massacre of 1937) and great traitors (such as Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei). With its past still politically troublesome, recent Chinese academic works in China on twentieth-century Nanjing have usually focused on the modernization of the city—that is, the physical elements of modernization that remain visible today: the tree-lined streets, the infrastructure, and the buildings. Nanjing has also figured prominently in Chinese studies on the symbolism of Sun Yat-sen, but the relationships between the city, its residents, and these symbols have yet to be developed fully.

In Western-language scholarship, though the proliferation of studies focusing on the cities of late Qing and Republican-era China is impressive, there has been little work done on Nanjing. Since the late Qing, reform-minded officials and civilians have looked at cities as centers of modern life. Many assumed that to lead the nation in the modern age, successful states would have to understand and organize cities in new ways to encourage modernization not only of the economy but also the people themselves. Much of the early interest in China’s modern development attempted to evaluate the effects of changes in administration and economic development that occurred in the cities, especially in treaty ports, where the foreign powers established new municipal institutions and invested in new industrial enterprises. The recent surge in urban studies has also focused on the changing relationships between state and society during the period. Initially, Western scholars investigated whether a “civil society” existed in China that was comparable to what existed in the cities of early-modern and modern Europe and America. More recent studies have focused on the emergence of distinctly Chinese forms of modernity, offering more nuanced understandings of the way individuals and groups respond to the changing economic, social, and cultural circumstances. Considerable work has been done on cities where the contradictions of modern development seemed most dramatic: where conflict between various contenders
(e.g., central governments, regional regimes, foreign powers, etc.) for municipal power allowed citizens to carve out spaces for protecting their own interests in cooperation with or in defiance of official power. Thus we have a large body of work on the cities of Shanghai and Beijing, as well as an increasing number of studies investigating other major cities.

One would think that as the capital of Nationalist China, Nanjing would garner more scholarly attention, but there have been few full-length studies on the subject (Coleman 1984; Lipkin 2006). One reason for the relative neglect perhaps lies in the assumption that, although the GMD did not exercise as much control over China as it had hoped, it did effectively control Nanjing. For example, while the regime tolerated occasional student demonstrations in the city, when protests became overly threatening the government easily suppressed them. In essence, then, Nanjing represented the GMD at its most controlling and repressive. That hardly made the city fertile ground for discovering an effective civil society. Nevertheless, this book attempts to put the city of Nanjing back into the Nanjing Decade by investigating what the city’s experience reveals about China’s modern development, as well as the role that it played in redefining relations between state and society. To recognize what actually changed during the period, we must evaluate the changes on their own terms.

Moving beyond Failure

The prevailing perception is that the Nationalists in Nanjing presided over an “abortive revolution” that did not live up to its early promises (Eastman 1974). In the late 1920s, GMD officials drew up many ambitious plans for modernizing China. At the same time, expert urban planners and architects set out to design and build Nanjing as a new, modern center for the nation. Most of the grand ambitions weren’t fully realized in the ten years before total war with Japan began in 1937. Thus, in depicting Nanjing as the Nationalist capital, it is difficult to avoid confirming a story of its “failure.” I have tried to resist drawing such an easy
conclusion, because after ten years as the Nationalist capital, the city demonstrably changed a great deal. It had new buildings, new streets, new monuments, and new attitudes about municipal and national governance. The responsibilities and relationship between the government that managed the capital and the citizens that lived in it also had changed.

The Nanjing Decade is coming to be viewed not as a period of simple failure but as an important stage in the long-term development of modern China. Recent studies have noted the remarkable achievements of the period. Domestically, even the GMD’s detractors have long recognized that Chiang Kai-shek’s strategies of anticommunist campaigns and taking on warlords one by one over the course of the decade were slowly expanding the influence of Nanjing’s central government. Meanwhile, it has been noted that central government officials, particularly in fiscal and foreign affairs, were better qualified and more professional than earlier studies have depicted, leading to an understanding that the government’s institutional effectiveness generally expanded, despite persistent problems (Strauss 1998). It has furthermore been shown that the central government also implemented some impressive development projects, many of which were related to key military industries. In foreign affairs, the GMD-led state impressively maintained the international recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, Xinjiang, and the northeast provinces; won tariff autonomy; and convinced the powers to agree in principle to the ending of other privileges such as extraterritoriality (Kirby 1984, 2000b). Thus, while problems certainly persisted, it is now more widely recognized that real progress was made.

One evaluation of Nationalist social policy in Nanjing from 1927 to 1937 describes how the government attempted to deal with society’s “undesirables,” such as rickshaw pullers, prostitutes, and beggars (Lipkin 2006). At first glance, one might think that this was another story of a repressive regime that tried—and ultimately failed—to remove such “eyesores” from the streets in an attempt to present a veneer of modernity to the world. But Lipkin shows that the Municipal Government was more effective than generally
believed in planning and constructing public housing that, indeed, helped thousands of people move off the streets. She also reveals, though, that people within the city were more than capable of organizing to resist the initiatives of the state when those initiatives clashed with their own interests.

Demonstrating administrative effectiveness is only one part of how a nation is built or a new state establishes legitimacy. Other scholars have been exploring how GMD power was conceptualized and constructed through discursive and symbolic frameworks that affected how power was exercised in the country. For example, John Fitzgerald (1996) describes how the concept of “awakening” was a commonly held ideal by which members of self-proclaimed “enlightened” groups, such as the Nationalist Party, legitimized their attempts to teach the masses how to be proper loyal citizens, especially since the masses had yet to understand what was in their own best interests (or so argued the enlightened). Michael Tsin (1999), meanwhile, has shown how the GMD attempted to bring a measure of control to the process of revolution by categorizing the members of the “masses” into various social groups—such as workers, peasants, merchants, and women—and then forming official organizations, which would serve as a conduit between the party and the now represented people (rather than letting the people represent themselves in a liberal democratic fashion). Fitzgerald and Tsin have both described the narrowing of scope of these discursive constructs, which for Fitzgerald led to the legitimizing of single-party rule (among party members themselves). For Tsin, the narrowing consisted of a gradual exclusion of groups from the realm of the “loyal” masses, such as striking workers or violent merchant militias that challenged single-party rule. Excluding such groups by declaring them to be “counterrevolutionary” and then suppressing their views reinforced the party’s claim to be the only enlightened, revolutionary party that could represent all the people.

Both of these studies end, however, on the eve of the Nanjing Decade. We have a good picture of how some basic modes of understanding about the relationship between leaders and followers were formed in the key years leading up to the
Nationalist Revolution of 1926–1928, but it is unclear how these understandings changed or how broadly they were accepted during the decade of Nationalist rule that followed. In this study, it is apparent that the basic ideals described by Fitzgerald and Tsin influenced how the capital was constructed, but at the same time the GMD-led state developed new approaches to maintaining the power of these discursive constructions.

While the GMD tried to create a plausible framework for explaining and naturalizing its desire to lead a new kind of intrusive “revolutionary” state, it also made use of an array of rituals and symbols that plugged party power into an already existing framework within which common people reimagined their roles in a nation among nations instead of at the center of “All under Heaven.” The rituals described by Henrietta Harrison (2000) legitimized new methods of popular participation in culture and politics. Even as liberal democratic institutions failed in the early years of the republic, the new symbols were seized upon by a wide variety of individuals and social groups as an increasing number of people were in fact empowered by the opportunities that republican political culture offered for popular political participation (Harrison 2000). That is, the people had to be represented somehow for any republican government to be considered legitimate. Thus, various groups used popular symbols to stake their own claims to political influence, making the early republic a far more “popular” movement than previous studies assumed. However, Harrison continues her study into the early part of the Nanjing Decade, and like Fitzgerald and Tsin she finds that the GMD tried to narrow the scope of legitimate popular action by co-opting and controlling the social organizations newly empowered by the transformed political culture. The resulting implication, once again, is that by 1932 the GMD seems to have stifled true participation by the masses in favor of something that was perhaps less genuine and not fully legitimate.

By focusing on the model capital at Nanjing, this book builds on this emerging story of the construction and contestations over notions of national identity. It continues the investigation of the
symbols and rituals of nationhood that were developed as part of the GMD’s nation-building efforts. While this study confirms these views that the GMD attempted to narrow the scope of accepted meanings of national symbols in ways that supported its ideal of single-party rule, it also reveals how the important dynamic of social negotiation that took place over these meanings continued unabated. By 1936, even as dramatic protests in Nanjing and elsewhere seemed on the verge of completely overshadowing them, national holidays were celebrated with greater gusto than ever. Even critics of the government admitted that the popular mood was changing to favor Chiang Kai-shek and the GMD.

Such popular attitudes cannot be manufactured out of nothing. During this period, Nationalists also seemed to be making progress in the symbolic realm, just as they were in the other aspects of national development mentioned above. By looking at the construction of the nation through the lens of the capital, it is apparent how common understandings intersected within the discursive ideals, the actual constructions, the ritual prescriptions, and the popular uses of capital spaces. They did so in a manner that may not have entailed the kind of unanimity that the GMD’s self-conception apparently demanded, but the result was shifting levels of conditional support, which is all that any form of legitimacy can really be.

Superabundance: The Importance of Architecture and Ritual in Chinese Capitals

A capital city is where vital functions of national administration, security, and finance are carried out. It also serves as a center of the nation’s “collective memory,” as its structures and events form a common frame of reference for the country’s experience (M. Boyer 1994). Capitals are rife with symbols of nationhood, with massive government buildings, palaces for heads of state, national museums, and archives. They also provide stages for the performance of national rituals and places where society can interact with the state. All of these sites are woven together in a capital matrix that
solidifies the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 1991). As new nation-states emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, political leaders recognized the importance of capitals in the creation of modern citizens. Following Haussmann’s transformation of Paris, there was an apparent competition—from Washington to Canberra, Ankara to Tokyo—to create magnificent national centers (Cannadine 1983; Fujitani 1996; Vale 1992). China was no exception. The Chinese Nationalist Party’s leadership recognized these important functions, and after moving the capital to Nanjing they set out to create a “model capital” for a New China and for world consumption as well.

As will be developed in later chapters, there was common agreement among party members, newspaper writers, and even student dissidents that the capital had a special role to play in the development of the young nation. In particular, it was assumed that a modernizing nation needed a center not only to organize development but also to serve as a model for how the challenges of modernization might be overcome, including the challenge of fostering nationalism and loyalty. Capitals are widely recognized as serving important political and symbolic functions, but in newly emerging nation-states they take on more importance because it is often imagined that the very fate of a young nation depends on having an appropriately positioned, effectively managed capital city.

The arguments of Nanjing’s advocates and planners in the 1920s and 1930s, though differing considerably from the past, resonated with long-held assumptions about the importance of capital cities in China. China has a long history of planned capitals, which were often divided into various wards serving particular administrative and economic functions. In the imperial-era discourse of capital construction, the emphasis was on how to position the capital effectively and then build the appropriate ceremonial spaces that would allow the emperor to maintain balance in the imperium. Centrality was an important element in the symbolic construction of a capital. During the later part of the Zhou period, a discourse on state building developed in which the capital’s placement at an appropriate center was considered crucial to the ruler’s ability to tap
into the cosmological forces of nature to maintain proper balance. A quote attributed to the Duke of Zhou, which appears in the *Zhou li* (Zhou rituals), compiled in the third century BCE, states the importance of centrality clearly:

May the King come and assume the responsibility for the work of God on High and himself serve (in this capacity) at the center of the land. I say that, having constructed the great city and ruling from there, he shall be a counterpart to August Heaven. He shall scrupulously sacrifice to the upper and lower (spirits), and from there govern as the central pivot. . . . I say, if you rule from this central place, the myriad states will all enjoy peace and you, the King will achieve complete success. (Quoted in Steinhardt 1990, 30; Wheatley 1971, 430)

Other scholars have described certain physical features of the “ideal” Chinese capital, such as north-south orientation, city walls ideally forming a square-shaped city, as well as key structures in the maintenance of the imperial state cult: a palace complex; a temple to the ancestors; altars to the sun, moon, soil and grain; and so on. This morphology was laden with meaning and served to place the ruler at the center of a microcosm of the commonly conceived Chinese cosmos. Despite claims that the ideal capital should follow ancient models, this was no unchanging tradition in reality: tremendous variation existed between China’s constructed capitals and the ideal, due in part to the dictates of the site’s geographical features or to changing ideas, over time, of space and monumentality (Steinhardt 1990; Knapp 2000; Wu Hung 1995; Xiong 2000; A. Wright 1977; S. Chang 1977). Nevertheless, there was a consistent belief that successful rule depended on having a capital properly located at the center and that it should include certain architectural features for conducting the key rituals deemed necessary to maintain the realm. In fact, would-be emperors, such as the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang, felt the need to construct the ritual spaces of the capital even before the end of military campaigns of unification; both were considered essential to establishing the
successful transfer of power from one dynasty to the next (Mote 1977; also see Fei 2009).

By reflecting the idealized cosmology, the structures of the capital then reinforced the rituals that made the emperor the “Son of Heaven” and head of state. Angela Zito’s work (1997) on the Grand Sacrifice during the Qing era illustrates how rituals in the capital did not just reflect common notions about the cosmos; they defined power relationships that could only be constituted through the bodily performance of rituals set in spaces that properly embodied that cosmos. Zito describes how every component of state ritual—such as ritual objects, clothing, the position of ritual sites, the layout of buildings and spaces—was imbued with significance drawn from a commonly understood connection to a cosmological worldview based on yin and yang correspondences. Placed in their proper spatial context, rituals then embodied a “natural” hierarchy in which ritual performers, whether they believed in the rituals or not, were bodily placed within this hierarchy. The Grand Sacrifice positioned the emperor consistently at the center of the entire structure, which helped to legitimize his imperial authority by placing him at the pinnacle of the material hierarchy while also reemphasizing the ideal of balance in his exercise of power. The rituals also forced participants to shift their positions from time to time, thus moving the emperor and placing him in inferior roles while allowing seeming subordinates—the bureaucratic functionaries, for example—to take on superior roles. These rituals succeeded because all involved had an investment in their performance.

Qing emperors of the eighteenth century benefited from inheriting a form of what Clifford Geertz has called “charisma” that was already widely accepted among the elites of China. Charisma, as Geertz describes it, is the ability of power holders to claim a central position in the popular imagination, whereby they seem to occupy a sociocultural space “near the heart of things,” as understood by people in the social order. Where they succeed, then, ceremonies of state “mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is
built.” In the case of the Qing, as in the examples cited by Geertz, the emperor largely inherited an already existing “collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances” that both elites and the imperial state used to “justify their existence and order their actions” (Geertz 1983, 124, 143–144). In reality, this “inheritance” was actually a process of discursive re-creation through sorting, editing, and authenticating the texts and practices that had been passed on to them (Zito 1997; Elman 1990; Chow 1994). However, while there was considerable debate among scholars about how to conduct the rituals properly, there was little questioning of the larger cosmological framework within which the political structure successfully claimed the central place.

By 1926, however, the worldview that naturalized the imperial state’s power had lost its legitimacy. The questioning of the old connections had precipitated the fall of the Qing dynasty, particularly after the examination system that had helped to indoctrinate elites in that worldview was abolished in 1905. As more and more educated elites looked to Western science to answer questions about how the universe worked, they simultaneously began looking for scientific methods to strengthen the military, modernize the economy, reform the state, reorganize society, remake the family, and even reimagine the individual. During the May Fourth Movement—a broad-based patriotic movement begun in the wake of student protests in May 1919—one vocal group of critics called for the complete rejection of what they described as the backward, superstitious ideology of Confucianism, to allow for the construction of a scientific “New Culture” that would ensure the survival of the Chinese “race.” Though the New Culture iconoclasts represented a minority among educated elites, by the 1920s the old understanding of “the way the world is built” clearly was no longer adequate, and a new set of symbols was needed to demarcate the new imagined space “near the heart of things.”

GMD leaders during the Nanjing Decade shared Sun Yat-sen’s understanding that a ceremonial center was needed to forge national identity and, hence, develop loyal citizens through participation in state rituals. Almost instinctively, those who constructed and
contested them knew that the nation’s symbols and rituals would not just reflect a new political order, they would also create it. I argue that to understand what the GMD did accomplish (instead of simply what it did not), it is necessary to look closely at how the Nationalists attempted to create that new order, how people responded to and affected what was constructed, and in what ways the ritual environment succeeded in establishing a kind of conditional legitimacy that other regimes made use of later. To begin to understand what the GMD accomplished, one has to look at the model capital of Nanjing and how various actors engaged in the enterprise of constructing change.

One key to the successful transformation of subjects through ritual is to convince them to participate in the first place. Lindsay Jones (2000) has developed the idea of the “ritual-architectural event” in order to analyze how sacred architecture embodies social truths and transforms those participating. While older architectural studies have emphasized the meanings of buildings as stand-alone objects, now scholars are coming to recognize that buildings only acquire meaning in the ways they are used by people and that as uses change over time, the meanings change as well. Edifices are now seen as playing fundamental roles in framing how people who live and work in or around them perceive their world, as in Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (1990). Architectural frames work simultaneously with other social and cultural constructs of knowledge to build commonsense understandings of the world that are then embodied in the particular actions that take place within that structure. Without analyzing the sociocultural practices that take place within buildings, there can be no apprehending the meaning of architecture, as recent studies by Ronald Knapp (2010), Ruan Xing (2006), Francesca Bray (1997), and others on vernacular architecture in China have demonstrated (Knapp and Lo 2005).

With concepts like the ritual-architectural event, works of architecture acquire a “superabundance” of meanings as a wide variety of official, sacred rituals (which change over time) take place, affecting and affected by the understandings of mundane people such as believers, tourists, and anthropologists (which also change
over time). Jones’ use of the concept of ritual-architectural event is particularly useful for the investigation of symbolic change, for it more clearly explains the potential role of architectural monuments to turn neutral space into transformative events. In transformative, sacred architecture, Jones describes a process of “allure,” in which an architectural monument through an immeasurable combination of comfortable familiarity and challenging difference invites potential participants to enter into a kind of interactive relationship with the space. Participants then can be transformed in any number of ways, which Jones categorizes broadly as ontological (one’s being is transformed), sociological (social conflicts are resolved, hierarchical relationships defined, etc.), spiritual (in the form of an awakening), and pedagogical (one learns something). One need not be consciously aware that change is taking place, but one does have to engage in the ritual-architectural event. To trigger the engagement, there has to be some kind of allure (Jones 2000, 95–98).

In older, inherited symbolic systems, convincing people to participate in a transforming event might not be challenging; the forms are familiar and the sociopolitical investment of participants already has been established (even if participants are not fully cognizant of how it all works or attach their own dissonant meanings to them). In this study, I argue that GMD ritualists, like other nationalists, saw the nation as a sacred entity, but the party faced the problem of convincing people to enter into a ritual relationship when many of the forms were too obviously and deliberately new, and when the benefits were not entirely apparent. The GMD wanted to transform the people into loyal citizens who would, for the present at least, agree to be subject to GMD single-party rule and “political tutelage.” At first, the GMD felt that the idea of revolutionary change in the name of strengthening the nation would be enough to satisfy most people, but party leaders discovered that there would have to be a more appealing allure if more people were to enter into the ritual-architectural event and be transformed.

In this endeavor to transform the people, Nanjing was not simply just another city. The model capital was conceived as a conceptual
whole: as a singular space in which the twin goals of material and spiritual construction were to find concrete embodiment. The capital was a place where residents and visitors alike would see how the advances of modern urban planning improved the efficiency of production and transportation in the city. People would participate in the new parades, mass meetings, and pilgrimages to the nation’s sacred monuments. As the center of all these functions and more, the capital itself was conceived as a sacred space where the people would be changed and the nation take shape. These transformations would be replicated throughout the land and someday influence the course of revolutionary change around the world.

At one level, Nanjing, the model capital, was conceived as a symbolic whole; yet in the day-to-day experiences of people who visited, lived, or worked in the city, there was no limit to the possible interpretations and meanings attached to the city or to specific sites within the city. By looking at the model capital in terms of the superabundance of meanings supplied by officialdom, planners, residents, and protestors, one can begin to see not only that the GMD was more effective than previously believed, but also that residents carved out their own form of agency, even at a time when individual rights did not exist. The choices city residents made sometimes conformed to and sometimes defied efforts by the party, the government, and planners to define roles that in their view clearly demarcated what it meant to be modern and Chinese. City residents who resisted using the new urban spaces in the prescribed ways were often labeled “backward” or “counterrevolutionary,” but in fact they were negotiating their own forms of modern life in the capital. In the end, both the plans and the people changed, and through investigating how the various social actors engaged in the dialogue of change, we can add another piece to our emerging picture of Chinese modernity.

**Overview of Chapters**

This study traces the formation of the hopes and visions for the capital and nation that were crucial to establishing new forms
of collective identity. The first chapter shows how the capital at Nanjing was born of factional and regional conflicts. It focuses on the bitter public debate that erupted in 1928 over where to locate a permanent capital. In this contest, regional biases between southern and northern Chinese were quite apparent and had to be transcended for Nanjing to be accepted as the legitimate capital of all of China. To this end, the GMD turned to familiar symbols and rituals built around their popular late founder, Sun Yat-sen. Sun Yat-sen was presented as a national hero whose temporary presidency in 1912 was used as the basis of a founding myth for locating the new capital at Nanjing. These efforts were an effective beginning of the process of legitimizing Nanjing as the capital, but it would take time to create the kind of new collective identification with the city that would allow that legitimacy to fully develop.

Chapter 2 examines the early visions of the new capital and focuses on the city’s urban planning “technocrats.” These officials attempted to plan the perfect capital, which would not only impress the Chinese people and instill loyalty with its monuments to nationalism and Sun Yat-sen but would also impress the rest of the world with its scientific efficiency and order. Nanjing was to be very different from the cities of old China. Planners wanted to transform the city from a backward place, littered with peasant farms and crumbling houses, into a gleaming modern city with a Chinese essence. In their writings, these experts emphasized international standards of modernization that included reforms in transportation, communication, hygiene, and recreation. However, the construction of Sun Yat-sen Road, which was to become the main artery for the new Chinese template of urban order, demonstrated that common people would have to suffer “short-term pain” for “long-term prosperity,” as thousands of homes were torn down for its construction.

After publication of the city plan in late 1929, architects began the effort of designing buildings that would turn ambiguous concepts such as “state” and “nation” into concrete reality. Chapter 3 evaluates a self-proclaimed attempt at an “architectural revolution” that combined the “best of East and West.” Though
early plans to create an elaborate capitol complex with a palatial GMD headquarters at its center were abandoned for lack of funds, many significant buildings were erected nonetheless. As with other elements of the Nationalist Revolution, previous studies of the city’s architecture have dismissed the stylistic combinations of buildings during the Nationalist era as “not remarkable” (Su Gin-djih 1964, 244; also see L. Liu 1989, 273, and Liang Ssu-cheng 1984). Looking at these government structures from the perspective of a historian interested in sociopolitical and cultural change, however, it becomes apparent that changes in spatial layouts revealed the forming ideals of statecraft and citizenship in China, as well as troubling contradictions.

The GMD hoped to use grand boulevards, new stadiums, parks, and public buildings as places for ceremonies that would in turn help to mold the new national citizen. Chapter 4 describes Nanjing’s most effective Nationalist monument, the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, which served as the main tool for reinventing the relationship between state and polity. The mausoleum and its surrounding memorial grounds served as the ceremonial center of GMD-led China, becoming the focus of efforts to create a new state cult around Sun Yat-sen that sought to inspire and educate people on how to be loyal to the “national family” and one-party government. By borrowing practices from the imperial-era state cult, Nanjing’s ritual center resembled those of old capitals. Yet significant changes were made to impart distinctly modern, Nationalist aesthetics and meanings to the ceremonies. In the combination of architectural influences, one can see the GMD extending an “invitation” to a domestic and international audience to participate in ritual-architectural events that the GMD hoped would earn the party greater legitimacy.

Chapter 5 continues the analysis of the celebrations of state that were centered in Nanjing. Beginning at the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, such celebrations branched out to include mass meetings at other major sites throughout the city, such as at the National Government Building and GMD Party Headquarters. Celebrations of state usually also culminated in mass entertainment
programs and parades designed to incorporate the entirety of the “masses,” as defined by the party. In the past, such celebrations during the Nanjing Decade have been described by historians as formalistic and insincere, denying the masses an avenue of true participation in the national polity. Yet thousands of people did participate. In this chapter, I attempt to evaluate these ceremonies to see why people participated and why by the end of the decade, more and more reports indicated that people “genuinely” entered into the ritual dialogue on national celebration.

To conclude, I look at the capital from the street level. Chapter 6 illustrates how residents of Nanjing resisted new regulations of spatial and temporal control. It also describes how citizens used the city as a stage to contest the new symbols and rituals of nationhood. It is through such contention that an administrative center truly becomes a capital. When people begin to express themselves using the structures and spaces of the new capital within a commonly held scope of meaning, those structures and spaces gain broader legitimacy. The sources of architectural meaning are no longer limited to the abstract symbolism attached to buildings or the denoted lessons of inscriptions and signs (N. Goodman 1988). The actions of the people in those spaces create a social meaning of accumulated and collective memory. Thus I focus on the streetscapes and public spaces where people gathered—for both celebrations of state and social protest against it. Even the Sun Yat-sen memorial became a symbolic battleground. Protests there revealed that the mausoleum, like the Lincoln Memorial, had strong symbolic power, which the state could not monopolize.

Overall, this study is about constructing the legitimacy of a capital city. It is the contention of this book that “legitimacy” is the product of conflict, not unanimity.13 A symbol gains its power not from being free from conflict but from convincing people it is representative of a higher truth, above the fray. By the end of the Nationalist era, Nanjing had become the legitimate capital of China, not because it had magically united the masses of China under the charisma of Sun Yat-sen, but because it was a functional symbol for the values of Chinese nationalism. As long as people
believed that it was important to struggle over the meanings and goals of nationhood in Nanjing, then the capital had succeeded in embodying the imagined nation that transcended the struggles.